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## Representation of Aging Women in Fashion and Non-fashion Advertisements

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**Presenter Information**

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## Representation of Aging Women in Fashion and Non-fashion Advertisements

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Keywords: Aging women, fashion advertisements, body image

In American culture, women over forty are seldom included in fashion advertisements (Lewis, Medvedev, & Seponski, 2011). Fashion media focus mainly on the representation of youth and young women. The ageist practices of fashion media potentially harm the body image of older women and classify the aging body as undesirable (Lewis et al., 2011). Media's portrayal of older women negatively influences society's views on aging women, and builds a distorted view of older women and their aging process (Grogan, 2016; Lewis et al., 2011). Aging women are often underrepresented in advertisements. This makes them feel they cannot relate as easily to the advertisements they see and are often frustrated as the standard of young beauty is unachievable to them (Grogan, 2016). Underrepresentation in fashion advertisements promotes aging women to develop more negative body images, such as body dissatisfaction, body anxiety, or eating disorder (Grogan, 2016). The differences in the inclusion and representation of older women in both fashion and non-fashion magazines have been previously overlooked in prior studies. By comparing skin and appearance of aging women in both fashion and non-fashion magazines, more comprehensive views on media presentation of aging women can be explored.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how older women are represented in fashion media compared to non-fashion media, based on the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison theory was utilized to explain aging women's body image and self-esteem can deteriorate when comparing the self with younger model images perceived as superior and unachievable in skin and appearance. Self-evaluation through comparisons with younger model images leads to upward social comparison that results in negative or dissatisfactory body image and lower self-esteem.

A content analysis was conducted using a total of 200 advertisements collected from both *Vogue* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Two-hundred advertisements in three issues, from January 2016 to February 2017, were collected. The frequencies with regards to model's age, skin appearance, and ethnicity were analyzed. The ages of women in the advertisements were determined using seven age categories ranging from tens to seventies and over. The model's skin appearance was evaluated using the Photographic Aging Scale of the Skin (Helfrich et al., 2007). Five standard photographs feature skin aging representative of the degree of fine wrinkling and consist of a 9-point scale where 0 represents no fine wrinkling and 8 represents severe fine wrinkling. Six undergraduate students were trained for data coding. Two coders independently analyzed the same models and negotiated their coding, if there were discrepancies. Raters' simple agreement for data coding for *Better Homes and Gardens* was 95% and for *Vogue* 98%, indicating inter-rater reliability was acceptable.

As a result, this study found many of the female models in fashion magazines were young-aged Caucasian and had no or few wrinkles. In fashion magazines, 61% of the models

were in their twenties, followed by 15% in thirties, 14% in teens, 7% in forties, 1% in sixties, and 2% in seventies and over. Regarding aging skin rating, 78% of the models had no wrinkles, followed by 18% with very mild wrinkles, 2% with severe wrinkles, and 2% with moderate wrinkles. Eighty-one percent of the models were Caucasian American, followed by 11% African, 4% Asian, and 3% Hispanics. Caucasian models in their twenties had the highest number of the ads (49%), followed by Caucasians in teens (13%) and thirties (10%), Africans in twenties (8%), and Caucasians in forties (6%). In non-fashion magazines, 32% of the models were in their thirties, followed by 30% in forties, 15% in twenties, 13% in fifties, 7% in sixties, and 3% in seventies and over. According to results for aging skin rating, 41% of models had very mild wrinkles, followed by 28% with moderate wrinkles, 13% with no wrinkles, 13% with moderate to severe wrinkles, and 5% with severe wrinkles. Seventy-nine percent of the models were Caucasian, followed by 15% African American, 3% Asian, and 3% Hispanics. Caucasian models in their thirties had the highest number of ads (29%), followed by Caucasians in forties (20%), twenties (12%), and fifties (10%); and African models in forties (6%).

Results indicate the majority of models featured in highly popular fashion magazines are younger with few to no wrinkles, usually in their twenties, than non-fashion magazines. Non-fashion advertisements feature more women in their thirties, forties, and older with very mild to moderate wrinkles than the fashion advertisements, but are often portrayed younger than they truly are. Both fashion and non-fashion advertisements prefer using younger and/or young-looking women instead of aging women over fifties to market their products, even if the product is frequently marketed to the aging demographics. The use of Photoshop may cause older women to think they can become younger from these products when in reality they cannot. The advertisements cause people to receive the wrong impression of what people really look like at this age. Additionally, non-White aging models in both magazines were seriously underrepresented, making them feel excluded in the American society. These findings suggest the media, fashion marketers, and advertising professionals need to change their current practices that exclude and misrepresent aging women in our society. Many aging women suffer from poor body image and psychological functions, especially when they become involved with upward social comparisons with young women's media images. More inclusion of realistic older women images in media can help aging women build a more positive body image and desirable self-image with psychological well-being.

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